

MENTAL FITNESS

A Newsletter of Self-Help Strategies

HOW TO CONTROL OBSESSIVE AND EXCESSIVE WORRY

Montaigne: “My life has been full of terrible misfortunes, most of which never happened.”

Excessive worry is exhausting and bad for your health. The imagination of the worrier is full of thoughts about things that will never happen, or that turn out to be not as bad as imagined. The mind cannot let go of thoughts that are troubling or scary and cannot see beyond a negative outcome.

WHAT’S GOOD ABOUT WORRYING?

There is something about worrying that makes it hard to give up. In fact, there is some good in worrying.

Worrying alerts you to danger. Ignoring a bad cough or not having your brakes checked could cause you some serious problems. Worry can make you take notice of a dangerous or unstable situation.

Worrying can prod you to take constructive action. For example, worrying about downsizing could motivate you to prepare a resume and upgrade your skills.

Worry helps you rehearse what you will do in case something bad happens. It can prepare you to accept what may seem unacceptable.

WHAT'S SO BAD ABOUT WORRYING?

Worry affects your body:

- causes insomnia and other sleep disturbances
- makes you tired and weary
- makes you unable to relax
- sometimes causes headaches or raises your blood pressure

Worry affects your thinking and your feelings

- makes it difficult to make decisions
- keeps you preoccupied and withdrawn
- contributes to pessimism
- keeps you obsessed, moving from one worry to another
- Interferes with concentration and attention
- wastes time and obstructs productive action
- reduces self-confidence
- makes you feel confused
- makes you anxious and apprehensive
- makes you feel depressed and discouraged

HOW TO CONTROL MOST OF YOUR WORRIES

- 1. Separate obsessive worry** from constructive worry. Constructive worry is like an alarm system that contributes to necessary action. Toxic worry is draining, scary, and paralyzing.
- 2. Use the 50-year rule. Ask yourself, “Will this matter in 50 years from now?**
Is what I’m worrying about really so important? Just how much is this worry worth?”
- 3. Exercise or engage in some constructive activity every day. Exercise and** constructive diversion change your brain chemistry and reduce excessive worrying.
- 4. Turn worries into plans and actions.** Worry is only constructive when it spurs you to approach and tackle problems.
- 5. Talk to people who are positive and reassuring.**
- 6. Talk to people who can listen and give wise advice.**
- 7. Meditate, pray, or do relaxation exercises.**

HOW TO CONTROL MOST OF YOUR WORRIES

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- 8. Get enough rest and sleep.** Fatigue contributes to worrying.
- 9. Have an action plan to address your worries.**
- 10. Engage in a task or diversion you enjoy.** It is hard to worry when you are immersed in an activity that gives you pleasure.
- 11. Stay away from “doom and gloom” people.** Worriers typically talk to other worriers and make themselves more worried.
- 12. Don’t reinforce your worry by reading too much bad news or watching too much television.**
- 13. Don’t take drugs or drink to combat worry.** It won’t ultimately help, but may actually give you more to worry about.
- 14. Focus on your strengths.** Read literature about positive thinking every day.
- 15. Be a good friend to yourself.** Learn how to talk to yourself in a positive, reassuring way.
- 16. Get your worries specific.** Are you worried about ‘money? What specifically can you do about it? What small step can you take toward reducing your money worries?
- 17. Try to stay focused on the present.** Most of us live in the past and future. But it is hard to worry when you are living and appreciating the present moment.
- 18. Take time in your life to sit quietly.** Sitting quietly may enable insights to arise which can help you to overcome or leave behind your persistent worry.
- 19. Try to put most of your energy into finding solutions to your problems.** Most chronic worriers focus on problems and not the solutions.
- 20. Try to have perspective.** When your mood is low, your outlook will be pessimistic. Remember that your down mood is not the truth, but only one view of reality.
- 21. Don’t be shackled by the past.** The past is not the present, nor does it have to be your future.

HOW TO CONTROL MOST OF YOUR WORRIES

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22. Try to diminish or eliminate your self-defeating beliefs such as “Bad things always happen to me.” or “It’s just my luck.” Unhappiness and dissatisfaction are *not* your destiny.

23. Make a commitment to yourself each day to simply drop or cut loose your fearful “doom and gloom” thoughts.

24. Remember how resourceful you have been in the past. Excessive worrying means that you feel vulnerable and lack confidence in your power to make changes. But you have already demonstrated, probably on many occasions, that you *can* change your life.

25. Think of a time in your life when you were optimistic and full of positive energy. Ask yourself what you could do now to get back on that track.

26. Resolve not to let worry dominate your life.

27. Prepare for and accept the worst possibility, but spend most of your energy working to make the best possibility come about.

28. Notice that each positive action you take reduces fear and worry.

29. Think about your resilience. Remember that you have survived past difficulties and you will survive any to come as well.

30. Be aware of the landslide effect. Your negative and insecure thinking can pile up and overwhelm you. Think of a phrase that can put the brakes on. For example, “Don’t worry, be happy.” or “Worrying is a waste of energy.” The sooner you catch yourself and stop worries from building up, the better.

31. Shake hands with imperfection. Perfectionism and inner peace cannot coexist. You will be perfectly dead some day, but until then you will not be perfect.

32. Accept that you will never get everything done. You may come close but there will always be more to do. The name for this condition is “life.”